

NORTHERN UFOLOGY



OCTOBER 1980

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EDITORIAL: "Confessions of a frustrated fantasy monger"

Before reading this editorial, rather in the form of a government health warning, I had best advise you not to take the slightest bit of notice of its content. You see it appears, according to two prominent UK Ufologists, that I am both a "frustrated fantasy monger" and a "myth-maker" - a perpetuator of pseudo-science (what is that I wonder?) SKYWATCH magazine even saw fit to turn their latest letters column into a voting contest between myself and one of the above. On my scoring it seems I won out - but surely there are better things to write about in UFO publications? SKYWATCH also did not see fit to publish my reasoned response to the character assassination attempted on me (even though they included one letter demanding such a response from me!)

That particular topic concerned the Bignall End saga, where witnesses seemingly misidentified the moon. Since the issue has been commented on both in a recent editorial and in these pages elsewhere I will not elaborate here. I know I acted in good faith on the evidence supplied by the investigators. I accept the case was probably stimulated by the moon. I do not accept that it is right to sling silly insults around or create phantom institutes. Nor do I accept that there is no point in questioning why such a commonplace stimulus generated such a response. There is a tendency amongst some ufologists to seek hardware saucers and to run away from psychological questions. It should be obvious to any dispassionate observer who was doing which of these in the case in question yet I am the one who is allegedly perpetuating myths! Oh well...we are all entitled to an opinion.

However, the other poetic description of my failings warrants more discussion as it throws up further significant questions. It stems from NUFOIS who, it seems, are reconsidering NUFON affiliation because of "the influence of the cult of the paranormal within the organisation". In support they marshal the June issue of NORTHERN UFOLOGY and its theme of UFOs and psychic phenomena (an open debate), described by NUFOIS as "the nadir in what is supposedly a serious ufological publication", and the OCT 11 conference specialising in CE4 events (it has not even taken place as these words are written let alone the NUFOIS article yet it is contended that it will discuss fantasy not ufology) CE4 reports exist and are a crucial aspect of the phenomenon (regardless of what causes them) and the staging of a NUFON conference on the subject, bringing together views from many of current UK investigators, seems to me a perfectly acceptable pasttime.

I contend that NUFONs strength lies in its ability to provide a community for varying kinds of UFO group. Each has a slightly different approach and there is much to be gained from the provision of a medium for discussion and debate of their various views. Surely this is how science functions. One listens to others theories and decides upon the relative strength of the evidence. It is childish to say that one must disassociate oneself from any faction one does not agree with. Certainly that is not science. Of course there are paranormalist supporters who get carried away and, as Bob Morrell puts it, "wallow in a mire of pure fantasy". There are also scientific ufologists (thats how they regard themselves anyway) who cannot see the wood for the trees. They produce theories so contrived they are ludicrous just to fit their belief that all ufo phenomena must be explicable in terms of known terminology. Of course if this were true of all existence scientific research would end now because nothing intrinsically new would await discovery... we would be in an absolutely unique historical position since there always exists a major conceptual breakthrough on the horizon. I refuse to believe for one minute that this naive view of the world is the right one.

In my opinion the CE4 and physical UFOs are different components of the basic UFO question (or questions). CE4s might be produced by alien intervention (just as some UFOs might be solid craft) I am yet to be convinced of either of these things. CE4s might be stimulated by interesting psychological/sociological phenomena, just as "solid" UFOs might be the end product of a variety of natural processes. Each hypothesis is tenable to some degree and to be a ufologist means that one must be willing to listen to all arguments and view all data. It would be a sad day indeed if the "paranormal" vs "physical" schools erupted into open warfare (although such a result is a natural prediction) There is much to be gained by a free dialogue between the two sides.

Bob Morrell also challenges the basis of NORTHERN UFOLOGY. The question posed by the June issue (asking if there was a UFO-Psychic link) was a reasonable one. The fact that all contributions supported that link just happened. This magazine is a free and open forum. I never solicit articles. By being free it acts as a mirror of current thought patterns. Bob did not submit an article but later did send a piece in reply, which was worthy of publication but due to length would not fit into either NUN or NORTHERN UFOLOGY easily. I suggested to Bob either a serialisation of the article or inclusion in UFOINs companion magazine INVESTIGATION but Bob finds this unfair treatment. I fail to see why, and I think the open-forum principle of this magazine is justified. Of course if you disagree say so.

Schools of thought in ufology seem to be important, but personally I find it impossible to take sides (even though this means one ends up being an aunt sally). I have no doubt there is a physical component to the phenomenon, and can sympathise with those who see science compromised by paranormalism. On the other hand there is ample evidence to at least suggest a link as a valid area of exploration. Bob Morrell believes psychic phenomena do not exist. They are "parapsychological superstitions". I would like to believe him but, whilst I am decidedly unpsychic, I had one completely verifiable experience of dream precognition which nobody will ever convince me was coincidence. Perhaps I went temporarily insane. Yet I am naturally more inclined to think that there might be more to life than our present blinkered thinking seems to suggest. My mind remains open, but the apparant evidence still stares us in the face demanding some kind of answer. I am afraid that no amount of verbosity will wish it away and I, for one, want to know what it means. After all I, like all the million others who have had psychic experiences or UFO close encounters in this country alone, might be mad. If so I think we ought to know.

----- COMPETITION - Christmas 1980

For the January 1981 theme it has been decided to have a competition. This will be judged by a special star guest and there will be a small prize for the winner. To take part you should complete your contribution by December 1. It should be under 1000 words and answer the question: UFOs exist because?.... giving a maximum of three reasons or pieces of specific evidence that convinces you (personal sightings will not be considered... the evidence should be convincing to others too). It will be very interesting to see the results!

----- NEWS ROUND-UP

- :: Significant news from the East Midlands is the launching of EMPRA (East Midlands Phenomena Research Association). This is a direct merger between UAFROL (the Leicester group) and CUFORO from Coalville. It is hoped that other groups in the Leicestershire area will join the new team shortly. EMPRA is organised by a committee of three; John Barden & Trevor Thornton from UAFROL and Mark Brown from CUFORO. This welcome move is an exciting new first in UK research. EMPRA have pledged to continue the liaison with NUFON that the former groups maintained.
- :: Contrary to rumours circulating down south UFOSIS (the Birmingham group) have not folded. Nor are they about to. There have been a few internal problems of late and a reorganisation has taken place but the group is well on the way to good health once more. Eric Westley (10 Alexander Rd, Acocks Green, Birmingham B27 6HE) is now in charge of investigator coordination.
- :: In Scotland the Scottish UFO Network have produced their first regular bulletin to investigators and are well and truly on their way.
- :: Bob Webb (21 Mandarin Place, Rove, Wantage Oxon OX12 0QH) is conducting a study of the famous Wantage monster sightings. If you have any information or references he would like to hear about them.
- :: Columbia Pictures have sent me all the playdates between October 19 and Feb 1 for the Special Edition of CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND, now on release. This has new scenes in it so should be worth seeing. If your group wish to try to organise a promotion tie in (as in 1978) phone or send an SAE for details of all your local playdates. This applies to the whole UK.
- :: The famous New Zealand movie film may be coming to the UK the weekend of Nov 24/25. FSR/UFOIN were offered the chance to put on a public show but it was decided to suggest DUFORA organise this in London, which I believe they intend to do. Details will be included here next month if they are to hand.
- :: DATE TO NOTE:- NOV 8, Birmingham University. Don't forget the great debate. Do UFOs exist? YES says Peter Warrington... NO says Ian Ridpath. Who will convince the audience? Come and find out. Tickets from the University Extra-Mural Dept.

3... MAGAZINE REVIEWS

FSR 26-3 is published with a report on the Frodsham CE3 case, MAGONIA Summer 80 is hot on the heels of the last one; Kevin McClure on ethics, John Hind on Vallee's new theories, Nigel Watson's CE4 report & John Harney on the search for life on other worlds in history (congratulations, by the way, to MAGONIA's Roger Sandell for a fine performance on Mastermind... proving we do have some intellectual ufologists!) MAGIC SAUCER Aug/Sep 80 has their usual enjoyable potpourri of childrens reports, stories and letters (no adult should feel ashamed of reading this childrens magazine!) NUFOIS NEWS, apart from the attack on "paranormalism" mentioned in the editorial has a reply to criticism of the working party from Peter Hill and more on definitions from Jenny Randles. SKYWATCH Sept/Oct 80 has already been mentioned but does have an interesting piece on UFO methodology by Allen Greenfield. FUFOR's UFO INSIGHT 6 has some interesting items about misidentifications and a published version of Jenny Randles's talk to the April NUFON meeting in Liverpool on the Feb 24 1979 UFO experiences. JOURNAL TAP (no 3) from BUFORA is the most interesting yet of this promising new venture... Stuart Campbell sets down his ball lightning theory to explain all UFOs, Peter Hill discusses statistics as applied to ufology and Tony Pace analyses the Hill CE3 case with a view to showing whether the aliens alleged did or did not come from Zeta Reticuli. The physical UFO antidote to MAGONIA!

A HORROR STORY FOR UFOLOGISTS

GENESIS by WA Harbinson Corgi paperbacks (pub Oct 23) 612 pp £1.75

It had to happen - I suppose. UFOlogy has finally produced its first pornographic literature! This is a story which Corgi claim is "the epic novel of the worlds most fearsome secret" From that you can gather it is about the great cover-up. That in itself is not so bad. Nor is the theory that a mad scientist is behind the UFOs (along with the airships, the Tunguska explosion, the Bermuda Triangle... you name it!) I can even put up with the lukewarm plot and stilted dialogue (I find it hard to believe, for example, that all the different characters would swear - as they all do - using the same expletive!) What I totally abhor (and this revelation may send shivers down your spine!) is the parade of explicit sex scenes (presumably for no other reason than to sell the book), the bad language, the incredible antics of Stanford (the ace investigator for ATIC - a fictional UFO group) who elicits data by beating witnesses to death or raping them! (we may be bad - but not that bad!) and the weaving of fact and fiction in such a patchwork that even a seasoned ufologist will struggle to know where truth ends and the story begins. The fictional characters supposedly know real ufologists, such as Dr James McDonald. Hynek crops up, Ruppelt (and his death) are an integral feature of the book and the dialogue often consists of page after repetitive page of memoirs from Project Blue Book or Project Grudge. NICAP and GEPAN are even in there (their investigators get killed by the way). Although some of the action is in Britain (an abduction case) British UFOlogy is classed as backward and left out of it (thank God!) It is bad - I warn you, and potentially damaging to our public relations if a hit (and with sex, violence and a conspiracy plot how can it fail?) It was a nice idea, but we still only have one decent fictional exploration of the phenomenon (Ian Watson's MIRACLE VISITORS - reviewed earlier... Its still my tip for the best UFO book of 1980!)

INVESTIGATIONS

| LOW DEFINITION | Time | Location | Level | Investgtn | Evltn |
|---|-------|--------------------|-------|-----------|------------|
| 8029 August 14 | 21.00 | Haslingden, Lancs | B | MUFORA | Insuf |
| Two fishermen by reservoir on rainy night. Saw circle of red LITS in water just off shore. Nothing in sky. LITS vanished and then came back on pulsating. Now seen to be <u>under</u> water surface. Fishermen fled in panic. | | | | | |
| 8030 August 15 | 02.00 | Haslingden, Lancs | B | MUFORA | Insuf |
| Elderly woman awoke to find bedroom full of light. Through window saw circle of 12 red LITS moving away. Backed off in fear and went back to sleep! | | | | | |
| 8031 August 30 | 01.00 | Dumfries, Scotland | D | ScUFON | Powerlines |
| Many witnesses all over area saw collection of R&Y LITS over hills for several minutes. Officially explained as powerline flashes <u>but</u> MUFORA are currently on the trail of very similar reports from Gt M/Cr at the same time on the same night! | | | | | |
| 8032 September 5 | 21.50 | Bidston, Wirral | A | MIGAP | Insuf |
| Man & wife saw 3 plusing W LITS stationary for just seconds close by moving a/c. | | | | | |

4...INVESTIGATIONS Cont...

MORE SPACE-DEBRIS

EMPRA have submitted a report (to be filed with others relevant to the phenomenon as case 8016). This refers to the observations in the Leicestershire area on the night of April 10 1980 (between 00.30 and 02.30) of multiple witnesses viewing lights, cigars and flashes. These are all attributable to the atmospheric re-entry of space debris (similar to the case of Cosmos 1068 in December 1978 but less pronounced because of the late hour)

SIGNS OF UFO LIFE...AT LAST

Not literally! But the sum total of UFO reports for 1980 (32) remains under half that of the previous most quiet year in NUFON records (and 1979 was down on most normal years) This is a factor found throughout the UK but there have been signs of life since July/August with a number of cases in the pipeline for inclusion in this newsletter. However 1980 still lacks a CE3, or indeed any significant close encounter from the region. "New" Ufologists are already rattling their psychological sabers to explain this.....Have you any ideas?

UFOs IN THE PUBLIC EYE

1) PUBLIC RELATIONS

by David Sydeserff

David is one of the organisers of the new Scottish Network and a UFOIN member

Ufology relies heavily upon public relations - after all it is usually the public who are the witnesses, the public who buy the literature and, naturally, the public who investigate and research (us!)

There is nothing much wrong with this set-up. It is one of the virtues of democratic freedom, but as you must agree UFOs are very important to the world and not just because of all the ho-hum of aliens telling us, via contactees, to join the CND and Greenpeace, but also in view of the ridicule witnesses to less pronounced encounters must face when they experience traumatic effects. Therefore science should be interested in finding out what goes on and attempting to stop it. This must mean not simply from the physical point of view (analysis of site traces etc), but from a psychological angle (why did a witness react in this way etc?) and the sociological one (how groups are run etc). There have been discussions on all these and scientists are interested (even when the "UFO" has been identified) So what I would suggest is that the investigator trot out his or her best reports to local scientific personages, illustrating the potential projects utilising these, and by and by the world gains more knowledge.

We now turn to the media, whom we know to be somewhat unreliable (which is understandable in view of the pressure of their work) Might I suggest the following : place an appeal for reports in the local press ("hello..I'm your local UFO investigator..Have you seen one?..Ninty percent can be explained etc") After dealing with the replies write an article based on these for the paper and see if they're impressed ("all these sightings happened in this region and no-one knew ...what are they? etc") The chances are the paper will be interested (with a line like the last one how could they resist in view of its call for public opinion?) Then it is just a case of getting on good terms with the journalist. If you want to be sneaky, though, hang around the pub nearest the newspaper offices. That's the easiest way to get to know them!

People are not going to report their sightings unless there is someone to do it to... and that someone is you - the investigator. It is your duty to "draw the fire" and make yourself known. The same applies to your relationships with the scientific community.

There is a catch to all of this, of course. Investigations must be of the highest quality for this to work. Also the ufologist must be knowledgeable about his subject so as not to be caught out with inaccuracies (Maybe we could devise and set our own internal examination to help out here... any comments??? - EDITOR)**

The only present guide to quality is UFOIN, and even that could be tightened up somewhat with all duff reports being rejected and membership criteria becoming even stricter. This must be applied to NUFON too, as well as any other regional networks. It goes without saying that the standard format we should adopt must be based on that of UFOIN.... including the "humdrum" psi bits!

** If there is any response on this idea of the development of an internal exam for Ufology a debate forum on this will be opened up within these pages.

NB: SUBSCRIPTION 1981... Renewals now accepted at no increase £3.60 for 12 issues

2) THE SMILING MEDIA MAN

by John Watson

John is a member of north-east group CHRYSIS and local UFOIN representative. His artwork decorates all the covers of this magazine and he is presently illustrating WINDOW ON ANOTHER WORLD - a new book by Jenny Randles & Paul Whetnall.

How many times have you seen a UFO reported in the papers or on TV and thought to yourself.. "why didn't we hear about it first" It's an old, old problem. People know that investigative groups exist but do not know how to contact them.

Right - thinks the brand new UFO group - we will get an article in the local paper. Off they go laden with information on their group, their aims, sightings etc. They waylay the nearest reporter, offload the data on him and sit back with smiling faces to await the outcome. Of course the media have one aim in mind - to sell copies - and they have a strict ruling about how much space individual types of news will get. Also they must sure that this news catches the eye and so witty titles have to be written. Our intrepid group is often sadly disillusioned when they see their article, postage stamp sized stuffed in a corner alongside an advert for ladies underwear and titled "Its eyes on the skies for UFOs, folks" (I have seen far worse than that!)

As I said, the over-riding factor is salability, so you take your chance and hope for the best. Not all newspapers are alike though. It very much depends on the editors viewpoint. If he is a sceptic you have no chance. If he is sympathetic or a "believer" then you stand a reasonable chance of getting a fair write-up. It really is as uncertain as that.

Your best bet is to get a friend in the newspapers. I am very fortunate in that one of my friends is sub-editor of one of our local papers. Still it is worth your while going to some of your local offices and finding out the views of their reporters. You may be lucky, and a friend on the newspapers staff is worth his weight in gold. They are often friendly little animals (and tend to have a passion for good ale!) but if you think a newspaper is going to take a rise out of you then take your article elsewhere! And don't even consider the big nationals - not even the SUN or the STAR. These types are the worst offenders!

What about other ways of getting good publicity? The only real ways are radio and TV, but with these extreme caution is needed. More than likely a radio station will be quite willing to give you a plug but usually they will want you to go to the studio for a live interview. No need to panic there, as long as you find out the questions before you sit down in front of that mike. Otherwise you will end up sounding like a gibbering idiot who wouldn't know a UFO if he fell over one! Here you are again subject to the beliefs of those in charge. One local radio station has helped us enormously. The other just doesn't want to know.

Having established a rapport the local radio may ask you to do a live phone-in and answer listeners questions. It can be a useful exercise but you must know your stuff! You are putting yourself before a potential firing squad; hoaxers, loonies, amateur scientists and many others will try to run rings around you. If your bottle goes you've had it. Rule number one in all media relations is make sure you know what you are getting yourself into and prepare yourself well!

Now to the ivory towers of television, the true realm of that most dangerous creature the S.M.M. (smiling media man) Second only to the MIB in UFO villany. I can best sum up the dangers by telling you what happened to CHRYSIS when we were approached by a local TV network in July 1979.

Our hearts full of joy at the potential publicity we were all for the idea of an interview by an S.M.M. at our HQ. This would also include visits to sighting localities as part of one programme about us and us alone. At least the world would know who, what and where we were.... No chance.... The finished product made our smiles turn to gritted teeth and thoughts of throat-cutting and knee-capping went around. The result was a series of six programmes about UFOs, related subjects and sci-fi called... wait for it... SUMMER SKYWATCH! All that was used from our interviews was the odd carefully edited snippet to illustrate a few points. Our address was not shown. No credit was given to us. The programmes used our information about our cases making it look as if the TV station had gathered it all. In general the series was padded with clips from sci-fi films, opinions from pulp book writers, idiotic experts and even a manufacturer of sci-fi toys!

The damage was not simply in the programmes themselves. Behind the scenes it was much worse. Example one... We loaned the nice man two original reports which he promised to photocopy and send back. We never saw them again and after six months

of angry letters and phone calls we were told they must have been lost in the post. Example two.... We were also promised a certain fee for expenses etc. This took nine months of angry letters before we received a cheque for £25 which barely paid for the petrol used to ferry them half way round Durham & Cleveland. Example three ... We were promised that every letter they received about UFOs would be passed to us for follow-up. We did not receive a single one!

If the nice man had wanted to he could not have done a better job of ripping our group apart. From a membership of 40 plus we are reduced to a working party of 5, our magazine has ceased to exist due to lack of support. Needless to say we are now very, very careful with publicity.

To add insult to injury the same network asked me to appear on a special live Friday night programme a few months ago. I refused, and was I glad when I saw it. It began with a mock-up UFO surrounded by CO2 fog. Out stepped the presenters wearing silver capes who were transported (care of the special effects department) into the studio. Need I go on? The whole programme was a degenerate farce!

So what advice do I have for publicity? Spend a little cash and draw up some simple posters (A4 size is quite sufficient) Place them in libraries, sports centres etc in the area (such places are usually more than willing to help). We have achieved good results from such posters (and even some police HQs have taken them!) Try the local press if you wish, but go for something simple (give them less to play about with) Anything deeper than that and you start needing friends. At all times make sure that you know what the final product will look like - and if you don't then pull out fast.

Beware the smiling media man...beware his jovial chatter...beware his promises ...beware his friendly handshake...and beware the knife up his sleeve!

3) TO ADVERTISE OR EDUCATE?

by Kevin McClure

Kevin is a UFOIN member as well as committee official of EMPRA, the East Midlands group. On the SPR UFO study group he produced the excellent booklet "Stars & Rumours of Strs" on the Welsh wave of paranormal events in 1904-05.

The first clue to this subject of public relations is to remember that generally they are not. For most people the fascination of our subject ranks alongside the horrors of vivisection and the nudist beach at Brighton - a matter of but temporary concern or passing entertainment. It is quickly forgotten. Sadly we seem to attract about the same low standard of media coverage too.

This raises a fundamental question with regards to publicity. Is it UFOs themselves we should be publicising, or our investigators as purveyors of UFO information? Is it enough that the public should know how and where to report a sighting if they wish to do so, or should we attempt to communicate something of the complex nature of the UFO problem, and to encourage a broader public appreciation of its multi-faced facets?

Clearly the latter option is the more difficult, and requires a great deal of thought and preparation. However, it would certainly have its advantages. Jenny Randles has mentioned the subject of hidden reports - that we, for various reasons, never get to hear about. If we were to succeed in involving the public directly in our subject, rather than just tangentially in simply making reports, we would be much more able to determine the breadth and variety of the material offered to us, because the witnesses would be more likely to feel that they were partaking in research to an end that was worthwhile, instead of being left, isolated, with their own experience.

If we could establish more realistic boundaries for the subject than have been accepted by the major UFO organisations, including some at least of the psychological/mystical/psychic aspects, we might have something more with which to work. Let us be honest. We have done precious little with the material we have accumulated to date.

Uneven as our organisation and quality may be, we have probably covered (more or less) the first of my options. If a witness wants to make a report of what he or she believes to have been a UFO (or more likely a flying saucer), it will not be too difficult for them to find a competent investigator. Naturally there are ways we could do this better (when did BUFORA last put an ad. in an up-market national newspaper for example?) but for the present it will do.

7...UFOs IN THE PUBLIC EYE Cont...

However, if we were to pursue some version of the second option we would have to look at ourselves and our PR more carefully. We would need to subdue our cranks, our extremists and our willingness to accept that any publicity is better than none. We would also need to present a united front to the world in general, and the media in particular, and to be able to explain that the one thing the UFO problem lacks is a coherent solution.

There is scant evidence, from experience, that any of the above hopes can be realised in the foreseeable future - we have not even learnt yet how to do any of the things required. For the time being, therefore, we should probably stick to publicising our investigation structure rather than our individuals or our subject. In the long run, perhaps, we can start to look towards educating and informing both the media and the public about the aspects of Ufology which so occupy and intrigue us, its acolytes.

4) THE COMMONPLACE PHENOMENON

By Mark A Tyrrell

Mark is secretary of the Cheshire-based group FUFOR (Federation UFO Research) and editor of its magazine UFO INSIGHT.

Journalism is both a noble and ignoble profession; it can be used to expose great evil and to make the public aware of what is happening in the world around it, whilst at the same time appealing to man's baser instincts. For instance, we all know of the traditional reputation of the Sunday newspapers, which has now extended into our working week through the publication of well-known popular tabloids.

The power of the media, through television, radio and the newspapers, is immense and it is often said that power corrupts. The world of UFO investigation and research has not remained untouched, or uncorrupted, by this power. UFO groups, plus interested individuals, should remain under no illusion about this. Make no mistake, that friendly editor is after news that will sell his paper, or increase his listeners. More often than not this is at the expense of objectivity.

So, when approaching a paper, or radio station, tread very carefully. Try to have something published on your own terms if you can. On one occasion the writer's own group (FUFOR) were investigating a photographic case that occurred during September 1978. The group wanted to appeal for co-operative witnesses and the only way it could do this was to have an interview with the editor of the local Crewe newspaper, which is published weekly. Stephen Cleaver, our chairman, went along, armed with relevant data and the photographs. Upon seeing the pictures the editor wanted to have them for immediate publication, irrespective of whether they were real or fake. A deal was made that if the paper would publish an appeal for extra witnesses they could have the full story about the photographs when FUFOR's investigations were complete. The investigations carried on to the middle of 1979 and the photographs were found to be fake. Nevertheless, FUFOR kept its part of the bargain and gave the editor his story. Although fake, the pictures received front page coverage, despite the fact that a local Crewe lad had been killed in Northern Ireland whilst on a tour of duty and details were printed in the same issue. The priority of stories may have been somewhat questionable, but the editor kept his part of the bargain. FUFOR were lucky in that the editor was a witness to a UFO event some 12 years before and had given our group reasonable publicity prior to the photographic case expose. However, a good thing cannot last.

Although press and radio publicity is desirable, there exists a danger of over-exposure, plus the unconscious effect on the accounts of future witnesses.

In the first instance the danger is that the media could become so saturated with UFO reports that the public may start to take the subject for granted, becoming bored with UFOs as the phenomenon is assimilated into everyday experience. The UFO mystery could pass out of fashion as a topic to be discussed and reports seem so commonplace that witnesses might not even bother to report their own sightings to a UFO group.

The writer has already come across witnesses who had to be coaxed into giving even the most basic sighting details, because they felt that it was a waste of time. In their minds they were saying that, after all the reports that have appeared in the press over the years nobody knows what is causing them so nothing will come from my report. To a certain extent is this not true?

8...UFOs IN THE PUBLIC EYE Cont...

Could the dearth of sightings since the beginning of 1979 be due to this factor? It is said, time and again, that publicity generates reports. FUFOR has found that this is not so.

During 1979 we had excellent publicity in the local press which culminated in the hoax expose mentioned earlier. No feedback from the public came as a result of it. Before that, in 1978, the group had a display at a local cinema, for a run of two weeks whilst the film CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND was showing. During that time numerous people looked the exhibition over. The result? Just one or two sightings which included a very pathetic hoax (MUFORA had a similar cinema display in Rochdale with almost the exact same result...ED)

Could the film have solved the enigma in the minds of the people who saw it? Perhaps the ever-increasing popularity of science-fiction films in recent years is fulfilling the needs of the general public's imagination; thus, negating any interest in the "real" mysteries of the UFO phenomenon and allied subjects. The questions one could ask are endless. The implications of the powers of the media frightening!

Every group of individual investigating the phenomenon must realise that although some publicity is essential (the public must know who to contact) there are real inherent dangers.

Another process of familiarity assimilation which has been happening is the increase of UFO-originated material used to sell consumer goods. These include cars, clothes and the ever-popular mashed-potato adverts. Recently the writer was suprised to see, in the local paper, the initials U.F.O. printed, together with representations of the popular concept of what "flying saucers" look like. You can imagine his chagrin on discovering they were at the head of a quarter-page advertisement for a company called United Fuel Oils. Could it be that UFOs are overtaking S.E.X. in the selling stakes? The writer, for one, sincerely hopes not! (And John Watson seems to agree judging from his cover - ED)

The writer feels that the "hidden reports" one hears so much about, the so called "tip of the iceberg" situation, will not be revealed by constant publicity in the press. Anything substantial will come forward by the removal of what Dr Hynek calls the "ridicule barrier". The Daily Express UFO Bureau did receive a lot of reports from the public, but the atmosphere of being able to tell someone about ones sighting in relative seriousness was, unfortunately, short-lived. The recent Sunday Mirror serialisation of the experiences of the Mann family from Oxfordshire may have some initial success in attracting UFO witnesses to come forward, but may prove to have a negative effect in the long term. The media is stripping away the mystery of the phenomenon, by making it commonplace, before anyone has solved the problems.

The "hidden reports" may be revealed if a groups public relations are in good order, although public relations is not just having good liaison with the media or local civil and military authorities. It also involves how an investigator acts in private and public, when on an investigation, giving an interview on the radio or even a public lecture. The investigator must be seen to be a sympathetic, open-minded individual who will take a witness's account seriously (not at face value). An aura of professionalism must be maintained and in doing so the confidence and respect of the media and public will be gained. This is how the hidden reports will come forth, and how the real evidence will grow. Not by relying purely on the media to do your work for you, with the news editors tongues planted firmly in their cheeks.

5) GRADUALLY, BUT QUICKLY, IT MOVED UP

By Paul Screeton

Paul is a well-known writer of books and articles on earth mysteries and the paranormal. Former editor of THE LEY HUNTER he now edits the popular review journal ANCIENT SKILLS & WISDOM. He is a newspaper sub-editor in the north east.

"Putting in a picture of Helen Ferguson half-naked won't make me read that rubbish", colleague Norman commented bitingly. (She's the one with the ringlet hair-do on the cover)

Always one to pooh-pooh any aspect of the paranormal, Norman naturally poured scorn on any reference to UFOs. My use of Helen Ferguson pictorially in "The Mail" (Hartlepool) - it being a "family" newspaper - had the young lady depicted with plenty of cleavage, but the picture was decorously cropped in a strategic place

9...UFOs IN THE PUBLIC EYE Cont...

(Although the identical picture had appeared in "Revue" without this prudish surgery) Not gratuitous pulchritude to enliven a subject of little interest or scorn for some, the use of Helen was justified by her having witnessed a strange aerial phenomenon over Hartlepool.

Having seen vague references to this event in captions accompanying her depiction in scanty clothing, or back-to-front swimwear, I decided to get to the bottom (metaphorically speaking) of her sighting. Not that I needed to justify my inquiry for I was using several other witness accounts of UFOs seen in our circulation area in my attendant article. (1)

By sheer chance the first of the Hartlepool Ferguson's I rang from several in the telephone directory happened to be Helen's mother. The sighting was in 1974 on the first Monday of the school Summer holidays. At the time the family lived in The Oval and Helen awakened her mother to share the experience. She told me: "I didn't believe in such things and thought it must be a reflection. However we opened the window and could see this red ball shape in the sky. We watched it hover over trees and it seemed to be turning slightly. Then it just disappeared" A reader's letter in "The Mail" for August 2 1974 confirmed the spinning light of that Monday, it seems, although absolute certainty is spoiled by the account giving both the Monday as July 28 and 29. More of this lackadaisical checking by newspaper staff is to follow.

I include this sober account to deliberately counterpoint the banality of the captions which have accompanied Helen's artistic poses. How true it is, I wonder, but at one time the job of Page 3 caption writer on the SUN was a highly prized and paid job for a single individual. Still, jealousy will get me nowhere! Here is a selection of gems from tabloids linking Helen with her sighting. Embroidery of the most whimsical kind.

SPACE AGE LOVELY... Starry-eyed Helen Ferguson is a space freak. Flying saucers are her cup of tea. If one lands today the little green men are bound to seek a close encounter of the page three kind.... HELEN'S A FAN OF THE LITTLE GREEN MEN.. Shapely Helen Ferguson believes in close encounters - she is a flying saucer fan. She has definitely seen a flying saucer, she says, Helen's heavenly body must have been a dazzling sight for any little green men aboard. And any woman on the saucer would certainly be green - with envy.... LOOK FOR HELEN'S HEAVENLY BODY... Helen reckons she has spotted a flying saucer but the outlook is grim for any alien who tries to make a close encounter - Helen's keen on karate.

Allen Hynek and his terminology has a lot to answer for! Whatever happened to intellectual investigative journalism? OK, so a silly or witty caption suits the subject, but it reflects the insidious way the popular press impresses a trivial and mocking attitude towards ufology... and John Watson's shows how he interprets such buffoonery on the cover!

I have published this year four lengthy and analytical articles on UFOs in "The Mail". Also one sighting account and pictures took up almost a full page, though Dirk van der Werff's sterling work would probably have been relegated to much smaller space had I not been assigned the task of laying it out and a spare page fortuitously fallen available.

Such factors make the impact and slant on UFOs an arbitrary journalistic fact. My department head, whenever UFOs are mentioned, mutters "as I was leaving the North Eastern Hotel I looked up and saw...." He is here recalling the mention of that particular public house in a UFO report but conveniently forgetting that the witnesses were two schoolboys who were passing by the hotel.

When I worked on the HULL DAILY MAIL 12 years ago I was impressed with their cuttings file of UFOs over Humberside. When I asked the deputy editor if it would be alright to do a retrospective article on the sightings he shook his head and stated darkly, "The editor doesn't like flying saucers"

The quality of any report will vary substantially from paper to paper, dependant on the views held at various levels. The editor may discourage coverage (and this may be declared by the proprietor), or take the view that subjects such as UFOs and ghosts are talking points which help sell newspapers. Whilst the nationals only occasionally have a big, brief campaign regional newspapers sometimes focus on the subject. Here the reporter is the key factor. If interested his perspective will make sense and his discussions with ufologists will be sympathetic and productive of data useful to other researchers. As often as not he will be ultra-sceptical and fail to be thorough, even scornful, favouring any debunking explanation he can find. As for the sub-editor, he may choose to make alterations to fit his worldview, eg

by rewriting the introduction and making it seem supposedly humorous. But it is the headline where the mischief manifests magnificently mainly. The NORTHERN ECHO reported a mysterious red flare falling behind the line of sight of a public house and following a police spokesman gave the headline "UFO- or 'thirsty spacemen' Spotted" This was just facetiousness, but often sloppiness prevails. A witness, reporter and sub-editor all allowed the following item of evidence to appear in the BILLINGHAM EXPRESS..."Gradually, but quickly, it moved up in the high sky"

This downright sloppiness I have named the Nicki Debus Syndrome, who is the other curvaceous model depicted by John Watson. I began to notice her name (and age) kept appearing in different forms throughout the press. This enjoyable research revealed she was Nicki 29 times, Nicky and Niki four times and Nickie three more. This indicates sloppy caption writing and sub-editorial incompetence. It goes along the line..the reporter thinks "the subs will put it right", an idle sub-editor says "if its wrong the comps will alter it" or "the readers department will catch it" or "nobody will notice it if its wrong" (2)

Flying Saucers suffer from the Nicki Debus syndrome, for scant care, accuracy and fair play is observed towards reports generally. The average journalist and his newspaper look at it that a sighting today can be stained by vinegar and chips the following evening. A UFO encounter is a transient thing to be used so long as it was in the circulation area - a mile outside and the story is spiked.

- 1) "Aerial pyramid hovered over High Throston" Screeton, P THE MAIL, May 22 1980
- 2) "The Nicki Debus Syndrome" Northern Earth Mysteries May 1980

6) SAUCERS FOR CONSUMPTION

By Jenny Randles

I was most impressed by this issues range of views on media relations, a topic I did not expect to generate such interest. It seems to me that we have all had ample experience of John Watson's S.M.M. (certainly I have more times than can be here mentioned, though I give some illustrations in my forthcoming book UFO STUDY) We have all made fools of ourselves (with or without help), and I am no exception. I have made errors of judgement - jumped too readily into print or onto TV for what I saw as Ufology's best interests (at the time). I was hypnotised by the charming lure of the journalist or producer who assured me that this time it was going to be different. It never was and hardly ever will be!

Mark Tyrrell's paper is, I think, singularly important and shows up the fallacy of our desire for publicity (a fallacy made only too clear by Paul Screeton's inside view). We may well be blinding ourselves to the dangers, but then how many of us are just in this subject for its kicks? To get one's name in the papers or to have one's friends ogling at you on the television may be a primary sub-conscious drive in many of us - far superior in fact to the urge to solve the mystery. This could even contribute to the "drop out" rate in Ufology. Perhaps the pinnacle aimed for is not a solution to an enigma, which may be insoluble anyway, but rather rising to a peak of notability. It may not be UFOs in the public eye but Ufologists!

This is something I feel we all should examine with honesty. I have been making a conscious effort of late to avoid publicity, after a period where it seemed to be almost a daily pursuit for me (I think I started to wonder when I ended up in TITBITS one week!) Apart from necessary book reviews I have avoided radio, TV and newspapers for over a year and I must admit I feel a lot better for it. No longer am I constantly worried whether I am quoted right or what I ought to wear when so-and-so's photographer comes around for that picture! It really had got to such crazy lengths. I now ask myself if we need any publicity and I seriously doubt it. Saucers are usually presented for consumption in such a fashion that we are far better off staying in the shadows. The various suggested methods of reaching the public (eg those of David Sydeserff and John Watson) are far more effective. Undoubtedly they do limit the number of reports we get, and keeping out of the media may well lose us a few useful cases, but MUFORA has certainly found that using other sources instead of the media does not dry up ones supply completely, and those we do get are often more evidential than the media generated ruffage.

In any case would it do any real harm to get no new UFO reports, for a while at least? Maybe then the true ufologist will stop worrying about next week's light in the sky and start thinking about last year's close encounters. Then we could find ourselves suddenly on the road towards understanding this whole subject.